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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a two-year longitudinal study which determined the relative effectiveness of three methods of coordinating language arts instructional procedures and compared these methods with two methods in which components were not coordinated. The five treatment groups, to which 789 first grade students were randomly assigned, consisted of methods of instruction that either did or did not relate spelling to the basal reader. The instructional methods were: subjects taught to spell words that appeared in the reader; subjects taught from lists directly related to the reader; subjects taught spelling only incidentally as the children needed words for composition related to the reader; and subjects who had no spelling or written composition instruction but who engaged in oral discussion and art activities which were related to stories in the basal readers. It was concluded that, since not all differences were significant, language achievement was most enhanced by teaching spelling words drawn from the children's basal reading series. Results favored methods relating spelling, reading, and/or oral language over methods in which these were not carefully related. (WR)

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A COMPARISON OF FIVE METHODS OF TEACHING LANGUAGE ARTS: SECOND YEAR

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For many years reading specialists and language arts teachers have held the belief that instruction in any one of the language arts promotes achievement in the others, with the provision that some degree of correlation or coordination of instruction between the parts is achieved. Others have held approximately the same belief concerning spelling achievement. For example, Horn listed several areas which can be coordinated in order to facilitate spelling achievement. Some of these are: the students' reading experience, handwriting, speech, activities involving written composition other than those devoted to spelling itself, teaching methods, the teachers' attitudes toward spelling and the interrelationships of all these factors in the instructional program. (Horn, 1960)

Further investigation of language arts instruction (reading, composition, and spelling in particular) reveals the strong relationship which educational research of the past has shown between reading and spelling test scores (Horn, 1969). Yet, as Venezky (1970) pointed out, reading and spelling can be viewed as opposite processes. Reading requires the production of a set of phonemes (or an idea) in response to printed symbols. Spelling, on the other hand, involves the production of printed symbols in response to a set of phonemes (or an idea). He also suggested that a good spelling program should have its basis in the speech of the learner.

As one begins to consider methods of coordinating language arts instruction, many possible procedures seem to substantiate the previously mentioned observations. For example, a language experience method could be utilized. This approach could use the students' oral dictation to provide instructional materials

for their reading, writing, and spelling. A second approach might be to start by reading stories aloud to the children. These stories would then become the stimuli for dictated summaries. After the students' summaries have been recorded in manuscript, the students would then copy and/or read their summaries. These and other examples could be accomplished without the use of textbooks or skills workbooks.

But inevitably the practicality of these approaches will be questioned, and with good reason. As many authorities agree, most teachers depend upon basal reading series materials and tend to reject more informal techniques. Consequently, there exists a need for the development and field testing of methods of correlating oral and written language activities with basal reading programs. These procedures should provide a practical and viable means of correlating language arts instruction which most teachers could adopt. This it is the purpose of this investigation to determine the relative effectiveness with methods which do not involve coordinated instruction in language arts. The second year of this longitudinal study is the basis for this report.

Theoretical Framework:

Three treatment groups (each involving a different method of coordinating language arts instruction around basal reader instruction) were established. The first group (Method 1) entailed the use of a wordlist from the basal reading series as the source of spelling words. The teachers of this group were instructed to teach these words as they were encountered in their basal readers. Games, drills, contests and other teaching devices built around these words were encouraged for this instruction. The only restriction placed on instruction was that

each child be able to recognize a word (or call it correctly) before being taught its spelling.

In contrast, another method (Method 4) used no formal or traditional spelling instruction. The teachers were to use the basal reader stories as stimuli for the production of stories or of new endings for the stories as supplied by the children. Initially the teacher transcribed the stories as the children dictated. As soon as the children were able, they assumed responsibility for writing their own compositions. The teachers were instructed to supply any spelling of words, orally or by writing on the chalkboard, that the children requested but no tests, drills or other emphasis on spelling were allowed.

In a third group (Method 5), no written composition or spelling was requested or required. In lieu of composition and spelling, they were to draw, model in clay, sculpt or in some other artistic way depict the content of the stories they were taught. They were encouraged to participate in oral discussion of their artistic productions.

The foregoing three methods (1, 4, 5) all related instruction in oral language (speaking and listening) to instruction in reading. In order to ascertain whether coordinating instruction in spelling, composition or oral language to reading instruction was indeed an effective technique, two alternative methods were devised. These two methods taught aspects of the language arts in such a way that instruction was not related or coordinated.

The first of these latter two (Method 2) involved spelling of words from lists not directly related to the basal reader. The children were taught formal or traditional spelling from lists of words which were picked by their teacher or which

appeared in their spelling series. Spellers were used in grade 2 by every teacher assigned to Method 2. Words which were common to both the spelling lists and the basal reader vocabulary list were not avoided; but no words were taught as spelling words simply because the students had learned to read them or because they were included on the basal reader word list.

The second method (Method 3) required composition not related to the basal reader stories. In the beginning stages (of Grade One) the students dictated their stories to the teacher as the teacher recorded. When the children were capable, they became responsible for their own writing. Words which the students could not spell were supplied by the teacher at the children's request. They were either spelled orally or printed on the chalkboard. No formal spelling instruction was administered and no attempt was made to relate the content of the children's composition to the content of the basal reader stories.

In short, differences between methods (or groups) were: Method 1 subjects were taught to spell words that appeared in the reader; Method 2 subjects were taught from lists (spellers) directly related to the reader; Method 4 subjects were taught spelling only incidentally as children needed words for composition related to the reader; Method 3 subjects were taught spelling only incidentally as the children needed words for composition that was unrelated to the reader; Method 5 subjects had no spelling or written composition instruction but engaged in oral discussion and art activities which were related to stories in the basal readers.

Methods or Procedure:

During the first year of study, each of thirty first grade classes from Douglas County Schools, Douglas County, Georgia, was randomly assigned to one of the

five treatment groups. The teachers were thus randomly assigned to one of the experimental methods. Treatment time was restricted to an average of fifteen minutes per school day. There were a total of 789 first-grade children at the beginning of the study, an average of 26 students per classroom and 156 students per experimental group.

All available students were administered the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test in September, the California Short Form Test of Mental Maturity in February, and the California Achievement Test (Lower Primary) in May. Complete data were obtained on a total of 598 students.

Due to construction of a new school, transfer of students and a shifting of students within schools the second year, the number of students experiencing the same method for two years was reduced. The California Achievement Test was administered in May. Some students were absent when the tests were administered. As a result of these contingencies, the total sample was reduced from 598 students to 221.

Statistical Treatments:

Analysis of covariance was used to compare the data from the various groups. The Duncan Multiple Range Test was applied to ascertain whether the differences between adjusted mean scores were significant (at the .05 level).

Results for the second year:

Within the limits of this study, it was found that:

1. The mean total language achievement score for Method 2, teaching spelling from basal readers, was significantly higher than the mean score of other four methods.

2. The mean total language achievement score for Method 5, art activities, was significantly higher than the mean score of Method 4, composition related to the reader.

3. The mean spelling achievement score for Method 5, art activities, was significantly higher than the mean scores of two composition Methods, 3 and 4.

4. Scores of females were significantly higher, at the .05 level, than scores of males in comprehension and in total reading.

Other results, not significant at the .05 level, may have important implications.

5. Total reading achievement mean scores of the three methods coordinating language arts, Methods 1, 4, and 5, were higher than the mean scores of the other two methods where instruction was not related.

Conclusions:

Since not all differences were significant one can safely conclude only that girls achieved higher scores in reading than boys and that language achievement was most enhanced by teaching spelling words drawn from the children's basal reading series. However, the pattern of results consistently favored methods relating spelling, reading, and/or oral language over methods in which these were not carefully related.